

DEPARTURE AND PROPHECY:
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF IRĀMALĪŅKA AṬIKAL
IN THE EARLY NARRATIVES OF HIS LIFE

This article deals with some of the early accounts of the life of Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ, a Śaivite poet-saint, social-reformer and founder of a new religious movement in 19th century Tamil Nadu. Irāmaliṅka's life, while eventful, was overshadowed in some respects by the extraordinariness of his death. For, he did not die but disappeared inside a closed room. Before doing so, he is said to have prepared his community of devotees and friends for this event in various ways. The article examines some of the earliest narratives regarding this specific event.

As a genre, these early narratives are a part of hagiographical literature or, "sacred biographies" – "those accounts written by followers or devotees of a founder or religious savior". The distinction between "hagiography" and "sacred biography" was established by Reynolds and Capps in *The Biographical Process*¹. Referring to the distinction Rinehart (1999:5) comments: "Sacred biography they define as "those accounts written by followers or devotees of a founder or religious savior," and hagiography, "the lives of saints, mystic prophets, kings and other charismatic religious figures" ... The benefit of this distinction is that it allows us to distinguish the significant

1. Reynolds and Capps (1976:3-4).

difference between accounts of the lives of founders (such as Jesus and the Buddha) which establish a new religious ideal, and the lives of saints (e.g. Swami Rama Tirtha) which in some way exemplify an already existing ideal." Even while this distinction is a useful tool in reflecting upon the main thrust of a narrative it is difficult to apply it to the narratives about Irāmaliṅka's life. Rather, from the beginning, these narratives attempted to combine elements of both types of writing: to speak for both Irāmaliṅka's uniqueness as well as for his exemplariness within specifically Tamil conceptions of sainthood. Hence, it seems appropriate to use the term hagiography for all these texts.

An examination of these early narratives shows that they are by no means uniform. Rather, there emerged multiple narratives of meaning, each of which attempted to give a coherent religious, social or theological framework for the disappearance. Yet, seen as a whole, many of the elements of the later, "official" biographical tradition which constructs an elaborate and coherent account of the disappearance, are already present in an incipient form in these early accounts, within the lifetime of the saint's followers. The distinction between the early narratives – which I look at here – and the later ones might be characterized as one of amplitude. In her careful study of Hindu, hagiographical literature, Robin Rinehart (1999:14) distinguishes between an earlier, hagiographical tradition initiated by the immediate followers of a saint which is still anchored to factual information about the individual concerned and a later tradition which relies more on myth and paradigmatic representations². Such a distinction between the earlier and later traditions is more difficult to establish for the Irāmaliṅka narratives. Rather, as I show here, the early narratives emphasize not only "facts" but also several elements of myth and paradigmatic representations of sainthood. What they do not achieve is the greater self-coherence and systematic framework of later narra-

2. "While the earliest hagiographers writing about Swami Rama Tirtha emphasized many of the "facts" of his life, focusing more on the Swami as an individual than an exemplification of an ideal, the later hagiographies move away from specific biographical facts towards a portrayal that draws heavily on mythical images and traditional models, a trend that has been noted in other recent Hindu hagiographical traditions as well." (Rinehart 1996:14).

tives, which through their piling on of detail achieve a more successful integration of the "factual" with the "mythical/ideological" aspects of the narrated life.

First a brief summary of the facts relating to Irāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ's life, by which I mean those details of the life which are present in all the major narratives about him³:

He was born in 1823 in Marutūr, a village near the famous Śaivite religious centre of Citamparam. His family moved around upon the death of his father and finally came to Cennai when Irāmalīṅka was still a child. In Cennai Irāmalīṅka eventually acquired the erudition of a traditional scholar of Śaivite religious texts and classical Tamil literature. During this period he started to compose what was eventually to become a vast corpus of religious poetry and began to acquire the reputation of a man of great learning. In 1858, at the age of 35, Irāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ decided to leave Cennai permanently and commenced on a journey which brought him first to Karuṅkuḷi, where he lived and then to Vaṭalūr, a village 30 km to the north of Citamparam, where he set up his organization and lived after 1867.

The early years at Vaṭalūr had been marked by a great deal of socio-religious activity and the building up of an organization dedicated to his religious ideas. In 1865 he established there a religious institution called the Camaraca Vēta Caṇmārka Caṇkam (< Skt: Samarasa Veda Sanmārga Sangha) whose name was eventually changed to Camaraca Cutta Caṇmārka Caṇkam (< Skt: Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Sangha) in 1872. It was meant to propagate the values of non-killing, vegetarianism, forbearance towards all beings, non-discrimination on the basis of caste or creed, non-adherence to rituals and burial instead of cremation of the dead. The central religious creed was the belief in an ultimate divine to be worshipped in an aniconic form, without any rituals as the "Great Light of Compassion", *Arutperuṇcōti*. Feeding and education of the poor were among the social priorities. In 1867 he established a charitable feeding house, the Cattiya Tarumacālai (< Skt: Satya Dharmasāla) for the poor. Once this house was built Irāmalīṅka shifted his residence from Karuṅkuḷi to

3. Here, they are taken from the most comprehensive one, the 1971 *Irāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ Varalāru* of Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ.

this house. In this year the first edition of his selected works, a compilation of four volumes of his poetic corpus collectively titled *Tiruvārūtpā*, was also brought out by his foremost disciple Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. The growth of Vaṭalūr as a religious centre in this period and all the activities at the Tarumacālai appeared to have created a need in Irāmaliṅka for some solitude. In 1870 he left Vaṭalūr for a small village near it called Mēṭṭukuppam. In this village he resided in a house which he had named "The Place which bestows *Siddhi*", Cittivaḷākam. In 1872, on the basis of his instructions, a temple was built in Vaṭalūr. Its foundations had the form of an eight-pointed star and it consisted of a central hall in which the community could do daily worship in front of a lamp. The temple was named the Cattiya Ṇāṇa Capai (< Skt: Satya Jñāna Sabha). By 1873, though, Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ seemed to distance himself from the organization he had attempted to build up. He felt that worship was not properly being undertaken in the temple and remonstrated with his disciples about this. After sometime when he didn't perceive any change he locked up the temple, took away the keys and forbade any worship. His own religious discourses, he started to curtail considerably. An important date in the organization had been the celebration of the *Kārtikkai vrata*, in November, when Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ would deliver a public discourse outside his residence Cittivaḷākam. In November 1873, though, he refused to do so, placing instead a lighted lamp in front of his room door and locking himself inside. The next three months he emerged from his room only occasionally. January 1874 dawned. On the 30th of January, a Friday, he called some of his close disciples, spoke to them at midnight, went into his room and was never seen again.

The disappearance of the saint became common knowledge in the area and eventually came to the attention of the British authorities of the South Arcot region, who decided to investigate the matter. In May 1874, three months after the doors of his room had been closed and never reopened, the organization was visited by Mr. George Banbury, I.C.S., Member of the Board of Revenue and Mr. J. H. Garstin, I.C.S., Collector of South Arcot. Under their supervision the doors of Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ's room were forced open and the room was found

to be empty. The British visitors questioned the associates of the saint closely and seem to have come to the conclusion that they were simple and pious people who had merely followed the instructions of the saint, that they were not in a position to explain what happened. Later, the volume of the Madras District Gazetteer for South Arcot District of 1906 carried a short biographical sketch of Irāmalīṅka Aṭīkaḷ under the name of the W. Francis, I.C.S which concluded with its account of the incident:

"In 1874, he locked himself into a room (still in existence) in Mottukuppam (hamlet of Karunguli), which he used for Samadhi or mystic meditation, and instructed his disciples not to open it for sometime. He has never been seen since, and the room is still locked. It is held by those who still believe in him that he was miraculously made one with his god and that in the fulness of time, he will reappear to the faithful. Whatever may be thought of his claims to be a religious leader, it is generally admitted by those who are judges of such matters that his poems, many of which have been published, stand on a high plane, and his story is worth noting as an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take."⁴

Important to note in this account of the disappearance is that the report speaks of the belief among Irāmalīṅka's disciples that he would appear again to his disciples and couches this prophecy in distinctly Christian terminology. The report, though, does not enlighten us on its sources for this information but, as we shall see, such a belief is expressed in the first, comprehensive record of the disappearance written by an insider, Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār who had also edited the poetic corpus.

In 1882, Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār wrote a remarkable English account of his master's life and death in a theosophical society publication, *Hints on Esoteric Philosophy*⁵. The narrative begins with the author's statement of belief in theosophy.

4. Ūraṇ Aṭīkaḷ ([1971]1976:624-625).

5. This statement is given as an appendix in Ūraṇ Aṭīkaḷ (1976: 611-623).

"Having come to know", states Vēlayuta Mutaliyār, "that the English community, as well as some Hindus, entertained doubts as to the existence of the Mahatmas (adepts), and, as to the fact of the Theosophical Society having been formed under their special orders; and having heard, moreover, of your recent work, in which much pains are taken to present evidence about these Mahatmas pro and con – I wish to make public certain facts in connexion [sic] with my late revered Guru." ⁶

The narrative purports, through this opening statement, to present the case of Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ as one which proves beyond doubt the existence of such "Mahatma/adepts". A case which should set to rest doubts that others may have regarding the legitimacy of the Theosophical Society.

Vēlayuta Mutaliyār, then, goes on to describe Irāmaliṅka and his doctrines in such a way as to establish that he is one such "adept" or "Mahatma" familiar to those who believe in theosophy. The narrative stresses Irāmaliṅka's auto-didacticism in the textual traditions of what were conceived of as the two important "races" of colonial India: "At the age of nine, without any reading, Ramalingam is certified by eyewitnesses to have been able to recite the contents of the works of Agastia and other Munis equally respected by Dravidians and Aryans." ⁷ It speaks of the esoteric nature of his "initiation" and his powers of alchemy and extra-sensory perception:

"In 1849, I became his disciple, and, though no one ever knew where he had been initiated, some years after, he gathered a number of disciples around him. He was a great Alchemist. He had a strange faculty about him, witnessed very often, of changing a carnivorous person into a vegetarian; a mere glance from him seemed enough to destroy the desire for animal food. He also had the wonderful faculty of reading other men's minds."

Vēlayuta Mutaliyār proceeds to prepare us for Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ's disappearance by speaking of events which foreshadow it:

6. Ūraṅ Aṭikaḷ ([1971]1976:611).

7. Ibid. On the emergence of the conceptions of the "Aryan" and the "Dravidian" races in the colonial period, see Bergunder and Das (eds.), 2002. "Arier" und "Draviden", Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle.

"In the year 1855, he left Madras for Chidambaram, and thence proceeded to Vadalur und Karinguli, where he remained a number of years. Many a time, during his stay there, he used to leave his followers, disappearing to go no one knew whither, and remaining absent for more or less prolonged periods of time." ⁸

The next section of the narrative sums up the doctrines *Īrāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ* in six, main points:

1. Though the Hindu people listened not to him, nor gave ear to his counsels, yet the esoteric meaning of the Vedas and other sacred books of the East would be revealed by the custodians of the secret – the Mahatmas – to foreigners, who would receive it with Joy.
2. That the fatal influence of the Kalipurusha Cycle, which now rules the world will be neutralized in about ten years.
3. That the use of animal food would be gradually relinquished.
4. That the distinction between the races and castes would eventually cease, and the principle of Universal Brotherhood be eventually accepted, and a Universal Brotherhood be established in India.
5. That what men call "God" is, in fact, the principle of Universal Love – which produces and sustains perfect Harmony and Equilibrium throughout all nature.
6. That men, once they have ascertained the divine power latent in them, would acquire such wonderful powers as to be able to change the ordinary operations of the law of gravity, etc., etc." ⁹

This part of the narrative is brought to a close with *Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's* conclusion that his teacher's aims were identical to and anticipated that of the Theosophical Society:

"In the year 1867, he founded a Society, under the name of "Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangham," which means a society based on the principle of Universal Brotherhood, and for the propagation of the true Vedic doctrine. I need hardly remark that these principles are identically those of the Theosophical Society." ¹⁰

8. *Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ* ([1971]1976:611).

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ* ([1971]1976:613).

He once again clearly emphasizes this theme towards the end of his narrative, where he has Irāmaliṅka express disappointment with the progress of his movement and predict that his real successors would be foreigners coming from Russia and America:

"But to his great disappointment he found among his large congregations but few who could appreciate his lofty ethics. During the latter part of his visible earthly career, he often expressed his bitter sorrow for this sad state of things, and repeatedly exclaimed: "You are not fit to become members of this Society of Universal Brotherhood. The real members of that Brotherhood are living far away, towards the North of India. You do not listen to me. You do not follow the principles of my teachings. You seem to be determined not to be convinced by me. Yet the time is not far off, when persons from Russia, America (these two countries were always named) and other foreign lands will come to India and preach to you this same doctrine of Universal Brotherhood. Then only, will you know and appreciate the grand truths that I am now vainly trying to make you accept."

Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār adds his own conclusions to this account:

"This prophecy has, in my opinion, just been literally fulfilled. The fact, that the Mahatmas in the North exist, is no new idea to us, Hindus; and the strange fact, that the advent of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott from Russia and America was foretold several years before they came to India, is an incontrovertible proof that my Guru was in communication with those Mahatmas under whose direction the Theosophical Society was subsequently founded." ¹¹

A middle section of the narrative deals directly with the Irāmaliṅka Aṭikal's disappearance:

"When he attained his 54th year (1873), he began to prepare his disciples for his departure from the world. He announced his intention of going into Samadhi. During the first half of 1873 he preached most forcibly his views upon Human Brotherhood. But, during the last quarter of the year, he gave up lecturing entirely and maintained an almost unbroken

11. Ibid: ([1971]1976:614),

silence. He resumed speech in the last days of January, 1874, and reiterated his prophecies – hereinafter narrated. On the 30th of that month, at Metucupam, we saw our master for the last time. Selecting a small building, he entered its solitary room after taking an affectionate farewell of his Chelas, stretched himself on the carpet, and then, by his orders, the door was locked and the only opening walled up. But when, a year later, the place was opened and examined, there was nothing to be seen but a vacant room. He left us with a promise to re-appear some day, but would give us no intimation as to the time, place, or circumstances. Until then, however, he said that he would be working not in India alone, but also in Europe and America and all other countries, to influence the minds of the right men to assist in preparing for the regeneration of the world.”¹²

The entire narrative is signed by “Tholuvore Velayudham Mudeliar, F.T.S” and witnessed by two other people, Munjacupam Singaravelu Mudelair, President of the Krishna Theosophical Society and Kumbakonam Aravamudu Ayangar, Fellow of the Nellore Theosophical Society. In addition, the narrative is attested for by one G. Muttuswamy Chetty, Judge of the Small Cause Court, Madras and Vice President of the Madras Theosophical Society. The attestation reads: “The official position of Vellaya Pandit¹³ [sic] as one of the Pandits of the Presidency College is an ample guarantee of his respectability and trustworthiness.”¹⁴

The first fact to note about this narrative is that it is framed in the form of an attested statement which was duly signed by two, “respectable” witnesses and vouched for by one further prominent person, in the form of the judge. These legalistic procedures give the narrative the gravity of a declaration given under oath in court, signed by the witness Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. The emphasis, therefore, is less on a hagiographical telling of Irāmaliṅka’s life than a sober recitation of certain “facts” on the part of Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. In being framed as a

12. Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ ([1971]1976:613).

13. Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, who was a Tamil Vēḷḷāla by caste, (a high non-brahmin, agricultural caste in Tamil Nadu) was at this time employed as the Second Tamil Pandit at Presidency College, Madras.

14. Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ ([1971]1976:614)

kind of "scientific" narration about esoteric and spiritual matters, Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's account would accord well with one of the professed objectives with which the Theosophical Society was founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott in 1875 in New York, which was to usher in a new epoch of both Science and Religion.¹⁵ It was also the "factual" nature of the narrative which Blavatsky was anxious to stress in her editorial note which prefaced this account:

"While at Madras, we were told that a well-known Tamil scholar, a pandit in the Presidency College, desired to have a private conversation with us. The interview occurred in the presence of Mr. Singaravelu, President of the Krishna Theosophical Society, and of another trustworthy Theosophist, Mr. G. Aravamudu Ayyangar, a Sanskritist of Nellore."

Blavatsky continues by hinting at an indepth and even partially secret conversation which she had with Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār which she cannot fully divulge:

"We are no more at liberty to repeat here all the questions put to us by the interviewer than we are to divulge certain other facts, which would still more strongly corroborate our repeated assertions that (1) our Society was founded at the direct suggestion of Indian and Tibetan adepts; and (2) that in coming to this country we but obeyed their wishes. But we shall leave our friends to draw their inferences from all the facts."

She then concludes by stating that Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār will now provide a simplified version of the narrative he had imparted to her and that such a narrative would be accompanied by the "certificates of respectable living witnesses who heard the Guru prefigure the events, which have had so complete a fulfillment."¹⁶ For Blavatsky, as much

15. On the first pronouncements regarding the Theosophical Society, as made by Henry Steele Olcott see Prothero (1996:49): "The society, Olcott proclaimed, would provide a "neutral ground" on which scientists and people of faith could stand side by side". "To the church it offers proof that the soul is immortal, at once final and irresistible; to science, those mathematical demonstrations of new forces and an unseen universe the lack of which has hitherto sent its votaries adrift in that current whose vortex sucks them into Infidelity, Darkness, and Depair ...".

16. Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ ([1971]1976: 615).

as for Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ's religious identity becomes explicable through the lens of theosophy – he is one of the theosophical “adepts” or “Mahatmas” who has foreseen or led to the founding of the society. As Prothero's (1996) account of the early days of the Theosophical Society has shown, Blavatsky had first located these personages in the Near rather than the Far East, and it was Egypt which was first seen as the land from which they originated or which they inhabited. “Adepts” were “a race of spiritually advanced beings” who could manipulate occult powers while “Masters/Mahatmas” were, “members of a secret occult brotherhood who had been entrusted throughout the ages with the task of conserving and propagating the ancient wisdom ...”.¹⁷ Much later, towards the end of her life in 1891, Blavatsky wrote of the “Masters” in an unpublished article,

“One of the chief factors in the reawakening of Aryavarta [India] which has been part of the work of the Theosophical Society, was the ideal of the Masters.... All that I was permitted to reveal was, that there existed somewhere such great men; that some of Them were Hindus; that they were learned as none others ... and also that I was a chela of one of them... Their chief desire was to preserve the true religious and philosophic spirit of ancient India; to defend the ancient wisdom contained in its Darsanas and Upanishads against the systematic assaults of the missionaries, and finally to reawaken the dormant ethical and patriotic spirit in those youths in whom it has almost disappeared.”¹⁸

It is as just such a spiritually advanced being, a “Mahatma” skilled in alchemy and with occult powers, who heralds the eventual emergence of theosophy in India that Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ is portrayed in Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative.

Another, compelling reason why Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār would seek to associate Irāmaliṅka with theosophy is the professed agenda or aims of the Society as Olcott and Blavatsky formulated them on their arrival in India. The oft-quoted general aims were as follows:

“To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

17. Prothero (1996:43).

18. Quoted in Johnson (1994:13-14).

To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science. To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man." 19

Olcott, in particular, in his first Indian lecture at Bombay in 1879, had placed high on his list of reforms the abolition of the caste-system, arguing that: "If India is to be regenerated ... it must be by Hindus who can rise above their castes and every other reactionary influence." 20

As Prothero (1996) has shown, the theosophical agenda for the uplift of India was particularly attractive to socio-religious, reform-minded, educated Indians. Apart from arguing for the Universal Brotherhood of Man, the society's self-proclaimed religious liberalism 21, the veneration of the Far East as the source of the true wisdom and the antipathy to the Christian proselytizing of the missionaries with the concomitant message that Hinduism can reform itself from within, through the initiatives of its own "Masters", "Adepts" and "Chelas" accounted for its immediate acceptance and widespread popularity in urban India and, initially, among reform minded religious leaders such as Dayananda Saraswati. In addition to this agenda for religious reform the Society's aims incorporated social reform, thanks to Olcott's rather than Blavatsky's ethical interests. Thus, at least in theory, the Society espoused women's rights and universal education, caste reform and the abolition of child marriage 22. These ideas would explain why someone like Toluvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, a member of the colonial educational system with exposure to the latest debates on social reform, would join the Society in its early days, within four years of it having shifted its headquarters from Bombay to Madras.

It is this new-found allegiance to the Theosophical Society which provides the framework for Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative. A lifetime

19. Quoted in Hastings (1921:304).

20. Quoted in Prothero (1996:76).

21. Referring to this religious liberalism Prothero (1996:59) points to the "critical contradiction inherent in theosophy, which proclaimed as its chief dogma the unity of all religions yet clearly preferred some religions (the religions of Asia) over others (Christianity)."

22. Prothero (1996:77-78).

of sole devotion to the Irāmalīṅka cause on his part was now being diluted, if not replaced, by his new theosophical interests. A perceived shift in loyalty could only be justified or even erased by showing that it was no such shift at all and that rather the Irāmalīṅka movement and the Theosophical Society formed one, seamless continuum. In his narrative, his teacher expresses deep disappointment with his own movement and with his followers shortly prior to his disappearance. The biographical fact of Irāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ having prevented further worship in his temple seems to indicate, at the least, some dissatisfaction with his followers and the organization which he had created. Now, in Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative, the pupil denies any deflected loyalty by joining the Society his master had predicted would succeed where his own had failed. In doing so, he reaffirms his loyalty to his first and primary allegiance. Thus, his "Master's Disappearance," too, could be plausibly construed as the disappearance of one of the Theosophical "Masters" who manifests himself only temporarily in India but continues to do the work of the Universal Brotherhood elsewhere in the theosophical world.

A more marked contrast to this English narrative could not exist than the panegyric to Irāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ in Tamil which Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār had written a good fifteen years previously, which had been appended to the 1867 edition of the *Tiruvārūṭpā*. This short, poetical composition of 66 verses (which I allude to briefly here) called "The Story of the *Tiruvārūṭpā*" (*Tiruvārūṭpā Varalāru*) provides scant biographical details about Irāmalīṅka²³ and none about his disappearance, yet it laid the foundations for the later, hagiographical tradition in several, important ways. Firstly, it named Irāmalīṅka Aṭikaḷ officially "The Vaḷḷalār who manifests/elucidates grace"²⁴ (Vaḷḷal: benefactor; patron, the gracious, generous king who grants boons; the copious one), – Aruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷal²⁵. Secondly, the poetic corpus Vēlāyuta

23. His caste and parents are named in one verse (v. 4), and the names of those who patronized the publication of the *Tiruvārūṭpā* are given towards the end of the poem in verses 57-61.

24. The epithet Aruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷal with the word *pirakāca* (<Skt: *prakāśa*) permits this two-fold meaning.

25. *Tiruvārūṭpā Varalāru*, v. 28:

taṇiṭṭ uraiṭṭa irāmalīṅkat taṇimaṇai ātarittuṇṇarntār
iṇiṭṭa aruṭpirakāca vaḷḷal eṇa iṇiṭṭēṭṭi

Mutaliyār named the “The Verses of Divine Grace” *Tiruvaruṭpā*, and he explained why in verse 35 of his poem:

Since it is the means [of salvation]
which causes [one] to live by dwelling at the two lotus-feet which
spread prosperity
of the Lord who pouring limitless, great love, engendering grace,
has the splendid, jasmine-adorned, fish-eyed lady [Pārvatī] on his left,
it takes the name *Aruṭpā*.²⁶

This verse, as well as other references in the poem, placed Irāmaliṅka Aṭikal’s doctrines squarely within the framework of mainstream Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* and the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta²⁷. Thus, the significance of the corpus of poetry is that it points the way to a total surrender to the feet of Śiva, enabling one to become the recipient of his grace. Similarly, the poet also compared the *Tiruvaruṭpā* to the canonical works of Tamil Śaivism, the *Tirumurai*:

If the great ascetic of Citamparam,
with its clear waters and southern groves, chooses
the *veṇṇpā* metre like cool waters (in the path of Tiruñānacampantar)
which [speak] of the meaning of grace in sacred stanzas full of the taste
of excellent melodies,
I am without the goodness to digest them.
Even to comment on them is a kind of fame²⁸.

aṇṭtam arṇār cila aravar antō enṇōṇ marantu
maṇṭtan enak koṇṭolintār mala vālvil cila maravar.

26. *Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāru*, v. 35:

aḷavāta pēraṇpu corintaruḷai viḷaivittut
taḷavārum nakaikkayarkaṇ taiyal iṭaṇ koṇṭa pirāṇ
vaḷamārum kaḷal malarōṭiraṇṭaruttu vālvikkum
uḷavālē aruṭpā enṇoru nāmam pūṇṭatuvē.

27. The canonical corpus of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta consists of the twelve *Tirumurai*, the devotional poetry composed by Śaivite *bhakti* saints prior to the 10th century CE and the fourteen *Meykaṇṭa Śāstras* (or *Śaiva Siddhānta Śāstras*), which are the theological treatises of mainstream Tamil Śaivism.

28. *Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāru*, v. 44:

paṇṇirmaic cuvai mutirnta tiruppaṇuval aruṭpayanaṭai
taṇṇir enṇoru veṇṇpāc campantap pirāṇ vālvil
teṇṇiṭ teṇkūṭal varum citamparamāmuṇi terittāḷ
uṇṇirmai oṇṇumilēṇ uraiṇṇattum ōr pukaḷāmē.

In this verse there is a kind of play on the meaning of the words, "the great ascetic of Citamparam" which, while obviously referring to Śiva-Naṭarāja as the dancing Lord of Citamparam, refers at a secondary level to Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ himself as the ascetic of the place, Vaṭalūr which he had, fully realizing the import of his act, named the "Citamparam of the Latter Knowledge" (*Uttara Nāṇa Citamparam*). The verse speaks of Irāmaliṅka's poetry as chosen by Śiva himself as pleasing to him. The poetry, too, has been composed by the ascetic of Citamparam in the same metre as that of Tiruñāṇa-campantar, in his *Tēvāram*, *Tirumurai*, 1-3 ²⁹. The poem, on the whole then, placed Irāmaliṅka's oeuvre within the canon of Tamil, Śaivite *bhakti* poetry, as a natural successor to the existent, canonical corpus the *Tirumurai* and reinforced this canonization by speaking of him, in other verses, as a Śaivite *bhakti* saint in the line of Tiruñāṇacampantar. The second, early narrative about Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ's disappearance would elaborate and focus exclusively on these kinds of themes.

In 1892, the collected edition of all six books of the *Tiruvārūpā* was published with a short biographical sketch of the saint. In this sketch two small sections written by Pirupkimānakaram Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār titled, "The vanishing of Piḷḷai's form" ³⁰ (*Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ tiruvuruvaṁ maraintatu*) and "The wonder of [his] salvation" (*mutti-vaipavam*) were included. A study of these sections reveals a

29. Tiruñāṇacampantar is considered one of the "trio" (*mūvar*) of the most important śaivite saints of the Tamil, *bhakti* movement. Dhavamony (1971:139) gives a short sketch of the hagiography of Tiruñāṇacampantar as follows: "Tiruñāṇa Campantar, who lived in the first half of the seventh century A.D., was born, according to Śaivite tradition, in answer to the prayer of his parents that the Lord Śiva might bless them with a son who would win over to the Śaiva fold those who had abandoned their ancestral religion and embraced Buddhism or Jainism, both of which were then prevalent in the Dravida country. His name, Tiruñāṇa Campantar (the man related to divine wisdom), derives from the Śaivite belief that he was at the age of 3 fed with milk mingled with divine wisdom from the breast of Śiva's consort. He became a mystic poet, singing the praise of Śiva and his blessings and arousing people to religious fervour and devotion through the length and breadth of the Tamil country... His poetic compositions stand first among the canonical works of Śaivism, collectively called *Paṇṇiru Tirumurai*."

30. Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ was called, at various stages of his life, Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai, Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai, Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ etc.

markedly different perspective from the theosophical approach of Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's to the disappearance of the saint.

The first narrative about the disappearance is as follows:

"Looking with a benign glance of grace at his close friends, after moving from the state beyond bliss (*āṇanātīta* < *Skt: ānandātīta*) to the spiritual practice of eternal bliss (*catāṇanta cātāṇa* < *Skt: sadānanda sādhana*) [Irāmalinka Aṭikaḷ said]: "Dear friends, we have determined to be separated from you for some time. We have also established ourselves in the eternally blissful *camāti* (*catāṇanta camāti* < *Skt: sadānanda samādhi*). Within a short period my body will vanish and not be visible to your eyes. This body will not be available for any of you to burn it in the fire or bury it in the earth. Henceforth, after remaining a *cittar* (*Skt: siddha*) for 40,000 years, obtaining successfully all the powers (*Skt: siddhis*), losing [myself] in the divine play and, after that, obtaining a *praṇava* body, we shall obtain the state of being a guru such as Nāṇacampan̄tar. Having expressed this resolve, having indicated something without actually having done so, crossing over the pure *māyā* of wakefulness etc., making himself the fodder for divine grace he became totally devoured [by it]. [In this state] with all his categories of existence (*tattvas*) asking for the service of devotion, with the *praṇava* itself as his form, and the birth of *sahaja* grace, in the Kali age, in 1874, ... in the month of Tai (mid-January to mid-February), on Friday, ... in the early part of the night which had the constellation of Punarpūcam, in the Cittivaḷākam residence, in the village of Mēṭṭukkuppam adjoining Vaḷalūr, staying motionless in that *sahaja samādhi* of pure consciousness which converts the artificial body into the real body, contemplating the true *guru* of his self, conveying his intentions to his friends to [have them] lock up the room in which he was sitting, he closed the gate of his senses, entered the state of silence and attained eternal bliss.

In accordance with this guru's commands, the room where he entered that state is kept locked at all times and taken care of by wellwishers. On the southern porch of his house, that vast thing called the "Light of Truth and Knowledge", which has aided to reveal that Great Vaḷḷal who went by the name of Irāmalinka Piḷḷai, which had been established during his lifetime, exists even today and flourishes. Just as this noble person whose attribute is consciousness intended, when those who have the authority to go and open that room permeated by the state of eternal bliss do so, in accordance with his command that if the room were

opened and looked at today, one would see nothing in it tomorrow, the room remains empty and pure space.”³¹

In Vēlayuta Mutaliyār's narrative, we have the statement that when Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ reached his 54th year he “he began to prepare his disciples for his departure from the world. He announced his intention of going into Samadhi.” Much else to his exact statements regarding his preparations is not given. Vēlayuta Mutaliyār later adds that in the last month of his earthly existence Irāmaliṅka reiterated his “prophecies”, implying that these were about the Universal Brotherhood and the coming of the Theosophical Society. A final statement which Vēlayuta Mutaliyār adds is that, “He left us with a promise to re-appear some day, but would give us no intimation as to the time, place, or circumstances. Until then, however, he said that he would be working not in India alone, but also in Europe and America and all other countries, to influence the minds of the right men to

31. Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ tiruvuruvam maṟaintatu in Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ (1976:176-178): *iṇṇaṇamāka ānantāṭita nilaiyiliruntu catāṇanta cāṇamurruṭ tamatāpta naṇparkalaṭi tiruvaruḷ nōkkāl nōkkik kaṭaikkaṇṭtu “aṇparkāl! Yām uṇkalaic cilakālam viṭṭup pirintirukkaveṇṇaṇ koṇṭuḷḷōm. Catāṇanta camāti niṭṭai kūṭa niccayittuḷḷōm. Eṇatu carīram ciṟṭu kālattuḷ uṇkaḷ kaṇkaḷukkuṭ tōṟṟātu maṟaintupōm. Ikkāyattai uṇkalil yārālum, akkikiṇṇiyīṟrakikkavāvatu, maṇṇiṟ camāti vaikkavāvatu kiṭṭātu. Inī nāṟpattīrāyira varuṭa kālam cīttarāyamartiruntu sakala cīttikaḷum cīttikkappēṟru ānantai tiruviḷaiyāṭṭayartiruntu atarku mēl piraṇavatēkiyāki ṇāṇa cam-panta kurutva nilaiyaip peṟuvōm” eṇṇuṇ kuṟippai vēḷiyiṭṭuc cuṭṭāmar cuṭṭikāṭṭip piṇṇu, cākkiramutaliya vaintavattaiyuṇ kaṭantu niṇru tiruvaruḷ kṟpā nōkkattīṟkut tammaiṟ uṇavākki muḷuvatum viḷuṇkappaṭṭavarāy tattuvamuḷuvatum iccāivalip paṇi kēṭṭap piravaṇamē tiruvuvāḱac cakacavaruḷ pīrakka vaṭalūraiṟ aṭutta mēṭṭukuppak kīramatit cīttivaḷākat tirumāḷikaikkuḷ kaliyāptam 1874-il ... tai mācam ... cukravāram puṇarpuca naḱṣatiraṇ kūṭiya pūrvarāṭṭiriyil ceyarkaiyuṭal iyarkaiyuṭalākat tiri-vupaṭuṇ ciṇṇāṭṭira cakajacamāṭiyil acaivaṛa niṇru, tamatāṭmārtta caṟkuruvaic cin-tiṭtu, tām amarttirunta avvaṛaiyai mūṭip pūṭṭikkolḷat tamataṇparkkuk kuṟippuṇaritiṭip pūṭṭacceyṭu, tāmuṇ tamatintīriyakkatavaṭ mūṭi mavuṇa niṭṭai kūṭ! nittiyāṇanta-murraṇar.*

Ikkurunātar kaṭṭalaiyiṭṭa vaṇṇam ivar niṭṭai kūṭiya tiruvarai nālatu varaiyir pūṭṭappaṭṭu apimāṇikaḷāl peṇappaṭṭu varukinṇratu. Ittīrumāḷikaikiyṇ takṣiṇa mukappil sṟī citamparam irāmaliṅka piḷḷai eṇṇum piḷḷai tirunāmam pūṇṭa vaḷḷar peruṇāṇ tōṇruṇ tuṇaiyāyirunta kālattīrāṭṭipittu vaitta cattiya ṇāṇa tīpameṇṇum ōr akaṇṭam iṇṇruṇ viḷaṅki ōṇki varukinṇratu. Intaccitkuṇap peruṇṭakaiyōr mur kuṟippṭṭa vaṇṇam catāṇanta niṭṭai kūṭiya avvaṛaikkuḷ pōyppārṅka atikāram uḷḷōr tīṟantu pāṛkkaiyil “iṇṇivaraṭiyaittīṟantu pāṛppīrēḷ nāḷaikkoṇṇum iṟukkakkāṇiṟ” eṇṇiṭṭa kaṭṭalaiyṇ vaṇṇam avvaṛai vēṇumaiyāyccutta vēḷiyāṭṭutalaṇkukinṇratu.

assist in preparing for the regeneration of the world.” Then there is the disappearance into the room, having it locked from the outside with explicit instructions that it is not to be opened and then the disappearance. In one sense, the account given by Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār may be seen as filling in the hagiographical gaps in Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār’s narrative: there, Irāmaliṅka had talked about going into *samādhi*, here we are told in great detail about the nature of this *samādhi*. Yet, a closer analysis of this narrative shows us that it contradicts in very specific ways the first narrative and generates a different interpretation of the saint’s identity and his teachings. An identity which can only be explained in terms of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta and the Tamil *Cittar* (<*Skt: Siddha*) traditions.

I shall not enter here into a detailed discussion regarding the pan-Indian *Siddha* and Sant tradition. But a few remarks on it are necessary to illuminate how the Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār narrative deals with the disappearance.

David Gordon White in his book *The Alchemical Body* defines the pan-Indian *Siddha* tradition in the following terms:

“As a common noun, *siddha* means “realized, perfected one,” a term generally applied to a practitioner (*sādhaka*, *sādhū*), who through his practice (*sādhana*) realized his dual goal of superhuman powers (*siddhis*, “realizations,” “perfections”) and bodily immortality (*jīvan-mukti*). As a proper noun, *Siddha* becomes a broad sectarian appellation, applying to devotees of Śiva in the Deccan (*Māheśvara Siddhas*), alchemists in Tamil Nadu (*Sittars*) [etc]....”³².

The pan-Indian medieval *Siddha* tradition tried to develop a concrete and coherent method for attaining *Siddha* status, involving alchemical practices and the transformation of the merely mortal body into a non-human, subtle and immortal one.

As far as the Tamil *Cittar* tradition is concerned there are two fundamental problems which scholars are confronted with when attempting to study this tradition, problems which also accounts for the astonishingly scant scholarship on it to-date. One is an issue of

32. Gordon White (1996:2).

definition regarding which group or groups constitute the Tamil *Cittars*. In one of the few English language full-length studies on the *Cittars* which exist, *The Poets of the Powers* ((1973:17-18) Kamil Zvelebil addresses this issue in his introduction, proposing tentatively three groupings:

"1) A group of alchemists and physicians, who have composed in Tamil a vast number of alchemic and medical treatises both in verse and prose, and who belonged to what is termed ... 'Siddha medicine' 2) A group of thinkers and poets who have composed a large ... number of stanzas in Tamil, more or less based on tantric Yoga in outlook and religious philosophy and practice between roughly the 10-15th Centuries A.D.; e.g. Tirumūlar and his *Tirumantiram* or Civavākkīyar and his *Pāṭal*. 3) A few 'Siddha-like' Poets who have been 'appended' to the Siddha school by posterior generations, or who called themselves *cittar* without properly belonging to the esoteric group itself: e.g. Paṭṭiṇattār (15th century?) or Tāyumāṇavar (17th century)."

Zvelebil attempts at categorization make apparent the problems related to *Siddha*-research, one of the chief problems being that of the relationship between this tradition and that of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta. A problem which can be concretely seen, for instance, in the case of the poet Tirumūlar and his text the *Tirumantiram*. The text is written in a partly esoteric Tamil and some of its doctrines appear to be characteristic of late Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, (*Tirumantiram* is appended to the sacred canon of Tamil Śaivite bhakti, it is the tenth book of the *Tirumurai*), all of which makes an early date for Tirumūlar highly unlikely³³. At the same time, Tirumūlar is also con-

33. Goodall (1998:xxxvii-xxxix) has succinctly summed up the arguments on the dating of Tirumūlar: "Scholars of Tamil generally place Tirumūlar earlier than seems plausible given the syncretistic content of the *Tirumantiram* (see particularly *Tantra* 4, which embraces even Tripurasundarī and the cult of the Śrīcakra). ... The grounds for placing Tirumūlar early (see Vaiyapuri Pillai, 1988:78, footnote 1) appear to be that the eight-century poet Cuntarar venerates a certain Tirumūlaṅ and the much later hagiographer Cēkkīlaṅ identifies this Tirumūlaṅ with the Mūlaṅ who claims authorship of the *Tirumantiram* (stanza 68). Vaiyapuripillai suggests that the *Tirumantiram* was probably written in the first quarter of the eight century AD (1988:77-8); ... The fifth of the nine *mantirams* of Tirumūlar's *Tirumantiram*, entitled *Cuttacaivaṁ* deals principally with the four of *jñāna*, *yoga*, *kriyā*, and *caryā*, and

sidered a Tamil *cittar*. In dealing with the *Tirumantiram*, therefore, we are confronted immediately with the problems of establishing the demarcations between three traditions: the relationship between Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta and Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta and, further, how the latter in turn is related to Tamil *Cittar* traditions; the issues of how they influenced each other and to what extent they are to be regarded as separate³⁴. This difficulty of establishing what exactly constitutes a distinctive Tamil *Cittar* religious tradition and its ambivalent relation to Tamil Śaivite orthodoxy, in turn, also permitted the figure of the Tamil *Cittar* to be appropriated first by Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ and then his hagiographers to speak for a “modern” religious movement which sought to articulate a distinctly Tamil yet non-sectarian, Śaivism. Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ, thus, sees himself and comes to be seen as a *Cittar* because he was a Śaivite religious figure whose life or writings indicate an interest in alchemy and medicine and in hatha yogic practices leading to *siddhis*. The narrative of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār, hence, artfully blends Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta terminology with the *Cittar*-like views taken from Irāmaliṅka’s own writings to explain the nature of his disappearance.

Thus, to begin with, Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār describes a certain process by which Irāmaliṅkar established himself in *samādhi* – a state which he reaches by crossing over the *māyā* of wakefulness, opening

we find represented there most of the views of the four characteristic exclusively of the late South Indian Śaiva Siddhānta ... there are other features of Tirumūlar’s work which are also otherwise found only in the works of late South Indian neo-Siddhāntikas, notably the emphasis on the role of devotion and the (often reiterated) preeminence of Nandin, the transmitter of all knowledge ...

34. As Goodall (1998:iv) in his critical edition of the Sanskrit Śaiva Siddhānta text, the *Kiraṇavṛttiḥ* has remarked: “Furthermore there is no tradition of teaching reaching to modern times that has transmitted and expounded the doctrines of the classical [Sanskrit] Śaiva Siddhānta formulated by Rāmakaṇṭha II. The Tamil-speaking South is the only area of India in which the Śaiva Siddhānta still thrives, and here Rāmakaṇṭha II’s influence appears gradually to have waned. South Indian thinkers fell under two powerful theological influences that have fundamentally altered the character of Śaiva Siddhānta: that of devotionism and that of Vedāntic Advaita. ... Six centuries after Rāmakaṇṭha II one thinker, Śailavāṭīnivāsi-Jñānaprakāśaguru of Sri Lanka attempted to reinstate much of the old Saiddhāntika philosophy of the Kashmirians; but he had to battle hard to present this as consistent with a body of more recently acknowledged scriptures that had since arisen to justify the new theology, and he came to be savagely attacked ...”.

himself up totally to divine grace, with his *tattvas* intent on the service of devotion, closing the gates of his senses, entering a state of silence and, through this process, which is called "*sādānanda sādhanā*," attaining "*sādānanda samādhi*". This description leans heavily on the Tamil Śaiva Siddhāntic conception of the highest path to liberation, that of knowledge (*jñāna*) which leads to the union of conjunction (*sāyujya*) with Śiva, a state of eternal service through loving devotion (*bhakti*) at his feet which is also a state of eternal bliss. Further, this state of salvation is brought about only through Śiva's grace (*aruḷ*), where he functions as or through the guru to enable the devotee's enlightenment³⁵. Instead of speaking of *sāyujya samādhi* Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's narrative refers to *sahaja samādhi*: a state of liberation within one's lifetime. At the same time, the narrative refers to certain bodily transformations which Irāmaliṅka undergoes: the vanishing of the body, the obtaining of a *praṇava* body and later, the transformation of the artificial into the real body. These allusions become only clear when we come to Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's second section titled *Muttivaipavam* (< Skt. *muktivaibhavam*).

Here Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār says:

"This indeed is the greatness of glance of divine grace obtained by *Valḷalār* who manifests grace. This conveyed [to us] what the real state of liberation is like. The ultimate state of liberation is when the body does not become like a corpse and collapse on this earth but obtains one type of *siddhi* among the three types. Now, the three types of *siddhi* which the body obtains even in liberation are the *Siddhi* with Form (*uruvacitti* < Skt. *rūpasiddhi*), the *Siddhi* without Form (*aruvacitti* < Skt. *arūpasiddhi*) and the *Siddhi* with Form and Formlessness (*uruvacitti* < Skt. *rūpārūpasiddhi*). This is to be seen as the greatness attained by our Lord of divine grace.

In asking how *Siddhi* with Form happened, when our Āḷuṭaiya Piḷḷai, the [saint] Cuntaramūrti Cuvāmi and Cēramāṇ Perumāṇ Nāyaṇār departed for *Tirukkaiyilai* (Skt. *Kailāsa*). Men of learning call these the Pure body (*cuttatēkam* < Skt. *śuddhadeha*), the Golden Body (*cuvaṇṇatēkam*

35. These doctrines, for instance, are stated in that standard manual of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, the *Śaivaparibhāṣā* of Śivāgrayogin. See, for example, S.S. Suryanarayana Sastrī's (1982) translation in which these doctrines are expounded.

<Skt. *suvarṇadeha*) and the Om Body (*pirāṇavatēkam* < Skt. *praṇava-deha*). *Siddhi* without Form is when the body of our Āḷuṭaiya Piḷḷai, [the saint] Māṇikkavācakar Cuvāmi dissolved with the ether in the Hall of Consciousness [in Citamparam]. *Siddhi* with Form happens when those elders such as our Āḷuṭaiya Piḷḷai [the saint Tiruñāṇacampantar] mingled with the light or Āṇṭavaracukaḷ [the saint Appar] mingled with the Śivaliṅga. Moreover, it is this greatness [which led to] Tiruveṅkāṭṭaṭikaḷ, Ciṟṟampalavaṭikaḷ and other elders establishing their bodies as Śivaliṅgas. The greatness of this Vaḷḷalār who radiates divine grace, who is skilled in all the *siddhis* is also of this kind.”³⁶

In this section Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār relates the disappearance of Irāmaliṅka to that of several others in the pantheon of Śaiva poet-saints: Cuntarar (ca. 7th century) and Cēramāṇ Perumāṇ Nāyaṇār who were contemporaries and were said to have died simultaneously and gone to Kailāśa together, Appar (ca 7th century) who embraced the Śivaliṅga and vanished, Tiruñāṇacampantar (ca. 8th century) melting with the light in the temple at Citamparam and more contemporary Śaivite religious heads such as Ciṟṟampalavaṭikaḷ of the Kañci Nāṇappirakācar Atīnam (ca. 14th century) who is said to have followed Campantar in the manner of his departure. Such as departure – a disappearance of the body rather than physical death – is also characteristic of the life-stories of “*nirguṇ*” saints as Lorenzen has demonstrated³⁷. To that extent, Irāmaliṅka’s disappearance, in this

36. *Muttivaipavam* in Ūraṇ Atikaḷ (1976:178-79): *iḷḷaṇrō tiruvaruṭ pirakāca vaḷḷalār tām perṟa tiruvaruṭ kirupā nōkkattaruṭpēru. Itu uṇmaiyaṇa muktinilaiyiṇṇatenpatuṇarttirru. Eṇṇaṇameṇṇiṇ, tēkam piṇaviyalāki immaṇṇilē viḷātu mūvakaic cittiṇṇūḷ ōr vakaic citti perṟu niṟpatē muṭivāṇa muttinilaiy eṇṇavārāyirru. Iṇi muttiyilēyūṇ tēkam perum mūvakac cittiāvaṇa, uruvacitti, aruvacitti, uruvuvacitti eṇṇapaṇavām. Ituvē nam aruṭperuṇcelvarkaḷ aṭainta perum pēṟāyutuṇ kāṇka. Eṇṇvāreṇṇi emmaiyaḷuṭaiya nampikalākiya cuntaramūrti cuvāmikaḷum cēramāṇ perumāṇāyaṇārūm tirumēṇiyōṭuṇ tirukkailaikkuc ceṇṇratu pōlvaṇa uruvac cittiyaṁ. Avai cuttatēkam eṇavum, cuvarṇatēkam eṇavum, piravaṇatēkam eṇavum vaḷaṇkuvar mēḷōr. Aruvac cittiāvatu, emmaiyaḷuṭaiya māṇikkavācaka cuvāmikaḷ tirumēṇi ciṟcapaiyilē paramākācamākak kalantu niṇṇratu. Uruvac cittiāvatu, emmaiyaḷuṭaiya piḷḷaiyār mutaliyōrkaḷ cōṭiyiṟ kalantatum, āṇṭavaracukaḷ civaliṅkaituḷ kalantatum pōlvaṇavumām. Piṇṇum tiruveṅkāṭṭaṭikaḷ, ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ, mutaliya pala periyōrkaḷum tammuṭalaic civaliṅkamāka niṟuttityatum ippaṟṟiyēyēṇka. Iṇṇaṇamē cakala citti vallārāṇa itiruvaruṭ pirakāca vaḷḷalār pēṟāyutuṇ kāṇka.*

37. Lorenzen (1995: 181-211).

narrative, adheres to a typology which is widely prevalent in the classical Tamil Śaiva hagiography, the *Periyapurāṇam* as well. What makes this narrative more unusual, though, is the introduction of a scheme of what I call “disembodiment”, – a scheme generated by Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ himself in his own writings and faithfully taken up in this narrative: that of the three kinds of transformation of the body. These three bodies are the pure, the golden and the Om body.

In his writings Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ appears to have referred to either the *cuttatēkam*, *cuvarṇatēkam* and *praṇavatēkam* or sometimes to *ñāṇatēkam* instead of the *cuvarṇatēkam*. All three bodies were seen as imperishable and eternal, the attainment of which led to the attainment of immortality³⁸. Thus, in Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār’s narrative, attaining bodily immortality and becoming disembodied, Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ leaves the world in order to acquire greater *siddhis*, to become an even greater guru. His very first statement about resolving to be separated from his beloved disciples for only a certain period of time hints at or promises an eventual return.

The two early narratives about Irāmaliṅka’s last days, discussed at length here, show us that, from the start, the first hagiographers were confronted with the problem of endowing the mysterious disappearance with adequate and coherent meaning. Thus, both narratives seek to produce different definitive explanations which, nevertheless, generate further unresolved questions. While Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār’s narrative speaks of Irāmaliṅka’s increasing disappointment and disillusionment with his followers and the utterance of a final prophecy which sees as his legitimate successors not his own people but foreigners from afar, Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār’s narrative has the saint, filled with love and beatitude taking leave peacefully from his dear companions. The aftermath of the disappearance is also grasped entirely differently in the two narratives. In Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār narrative the disappearance makes sense only retrospectively, with the coming of the Theosophical Society. Through an imaginative act, the saint is now transported to Europe and America, as one among the “Masters/

38. See Francis (1990:53-61) on Irāmaliṅka’s conceptions of his own deathlessness in the verses of the *Tiruvārūpā*.

Mahatmas" who continues to work for Universal Brotherhood. In Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's version the saint remains rooted to the Tamil, specifically Śaiva, religious space: he has left to become a *Siddha* and his departure is cushioned by the flame of the lamp which he had lit within his lifetime; a lamp which continues to reassure his bereft companions and illuminate their world. The two narratives articulate this by taking recourse to entirely different prophecies uttered by the saint. Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative conveys, (however much it attempts to disguise it) the uneasiness felt by a direct disciple of the saint who has experienced his presence and also the events which led up to the disappearance. In Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's narrative all potential problems are glossed over in an idealized portrait of the saint and his certitude in the final days. Yet, paradoxically, it is Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's version which also supplies a definitive answer to the question: what became of Irāmaliṅka Aṭikal? It conjectures his permanent residence elsewhere. In Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's version there is only the unspecified hope that the departure which he eventually succeeded by a return to his people, who are pledged then to wait for this arrival.

Hagiographies, as recent studies have amply demonstrated, are not so much about facts and historical plausibility as about presenting stories for the religious community of followers of a saint, stories which, in their blend of myth, history and conjecture reveal much about how the community sees itself in the existing social and historical context. The two narratives considered here show us that already in the early days, the hagiographical tradition on Irāmaliṅka opted for at least two different interpretations of his significance: to see him as a prophet of the future or to see him as an exemplar of a hoary Śaivite tradition. In the two narratives mentioned these approaches are starkly delineated in the focus on his disappearance. But, in the later full-length hagiographies there would be a systematic attempt to blend both approaches into a coherent whole in an attempt to capture, as comprehensively as possible, the elusive nature of Irāmaliṅka Aṭikal's sainthood.

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